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## 150 Profiles: Alia Scanlon

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*As a way to mark the 150th anniversary of confederation, The Philanthropist [profiled Canadians](#) from across the non-profit sector and put a face to 150 individuals who work or volunteer in Canada's social sector. As 2017 drew to a close, we published our final profile of 2017 -- reaching our target of speaking with 150 people! The Philanthropist recognizes that Canada's history did not begin 150 years ago. And it will continue beyond 150 years. In this spirit, we will continue to profile people in the non-profit sector throughout 2018.*

**Name:** Alia Scanlon

**Current role in the sector:** Project Director of [Jane's Walk](#), a project of Tides Canada

**Years working and/or volunteering in the non-profit sector:** 20 years.

**What was your first job in the sector or a defining moment?**

I've volunteered all my life, but didn't actually entertain the idea of a career in the nonprofit sector until my mid-20s. I was working for a big management consulting firm in Shanghai and feeling peeved about how much of my time I was spending helping car manufacturers figure out how to sell more cars. I realized that I felt much more energized by the volunteer work I was doing with a local environmental organization, ditched my MBA ambitions, and went for the MPA instead.

**Describe your desk/workspace.**

Since late last year, I've been office-hopping between two co-working spaces: CSI Annex and the City Builders Lab at 401 Richmond in Toronto, so I have two shared desks I get to choose from every day. They're both older buildings filled with creativity and community. Both spaces are always buzzing with smart people doing incredible things. For most of the year, it's just me

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at Jane's Walk, so having lots of people around to collaborate with and talk keeps me energized and inspired.

**What are you reading or following that has expanded your understanding of the non-profit sector?**

I've been reading [Messy: The Power of Disorder to Transform Our Lives](#) by Tim Harford. It's validating a lot of my own learning experiences in community organizing and city-building. Jane Jacobs believed that cities are complex organisms upon which one cannot impose any real order, and encouraged us to embrace the fact that cities are messy, communities are complicated, and there are no easy solutions. I've taken that to heart and always encourage people coming into this kind of work to find a way to sit comfortably in chaos rather than attempt to order the chaos around.

**What do you think our sector needs to be thinking about?**

I've been doing a lot of thinking about the ethical use of donated labor. The majority of Jane's Walk volunteers are young people who use volunteer opportunities to seek employment, not feel warm fuzzies. In a lot of ways, our volunteers aren't a resource to be used -- they're beneficiaries of our programming, and they need to be treated as such. I've stopped taking on volunteers unless I know I have the resources to support them and can ensure that they are getting value out of their labour. I hope the sector takes a long, hard look at its use of volunteers and assesses its own contributions to labor precarity.

[Read more about Jane's Walk.](#)

*Do you know someone we should profile as part of this series? Email us at [philanthropistprofiles@gmail.com](mailto:philanthropistprofiles@gmail.com)*